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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000702

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SUBJECT: EUROPEANS HOPE AU TRIP WILL PRESSURE ABDALLAHI TO
BE A REALIST

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Strong divisions remain between U.S. and European views of the way forward following the November 21 Addis Ababa meeting. The Europeans believe the high level AU/UN/EU/Arab League/OIC/Francophonie visit of December 5-7 needs to seek negotiation and encourage realism by President Abdallahi. They see the power of the international community to influence the return of constitutional order having a limited life-span and further focus on the return of President Abdallahi as a pre-condition a counterproductive strategy. End Summary

¶2. (C) Divisions still persist: In the first meeting on November 26 of the Western embassies with the UN, EC, IMF and World Bank since last week's visits to President Abdallahi and the European Union and African Union decisions of November 20 and 21, clear differences on next steps remain between the European block (with UNDP support) and the U.S. (with vocal World Bank support). The EC Representative, who is usually strongly aligned with the U.S. was not present -- his deputy remained largely silent. The French, German and Spanish Ambassador's shared the sense following their November 18 visit to Lemden that the President's staunch role of non-dialogue with the regime makes the President the primary obstacle to the return to "acceptable" democratic progress in Mauritania. All three raised their concern that President Abdallahi had asked them to "impose sanctions against the Mauritanian people so they will turn against the regime" suggesting Abdallahi's sole focus on "legitimacy" ran to the point of seeing his own people suffer. They noted the FNDD came out the day after their meeting with the President saying the FNDD does not support general sanctions -- only targeted ones -- which, for the Europeans, brought into question how much Abdallahi was coordinating with/listening to his advisors.

¶3. (C) Sidi's Return - "Agree with the concept but don't believe we can get there": French Ambassador Vandepoorter told Charge that France remains in agreement with the U.S. position that the return of President Abdallahi to power as an ideal but added, "my own analysis is that we can't get there." Spanish Ambassador Polanco followed saying he saw the emphasis of every international mediator on Abdallahi's return had effectively wasted four months of potential progress -- "When the first question each envoy asks Aziz is, 'When will President Abdallahi come back?,' they have closed off any possibility of seeing what else can be accomplished."

Polanco cautioned that if progress is not taken towards a resolution based on the possible, versus the ideal, President Abdallahi will become "an ever more isolated old gentlemen we go visit once a quarter in Lemden" and the hardest line of the military regime will be strengthened, not weakened. Polanco saw the possible sanctions under the Coutonou Agreement the most effective leverage on the regime but cautioned that, once used, they have no further value. German Ambassador Schanze -- always the feistiest of the Europeans -- said, "Within the regime there are some military guys who only know of camels and sand dunes -- they are the hard line that gain from the lack of progress. But there are others who know the world outside Mauritania -- they want to get back to something acceptable but can't the dialogue begins and ends with Abdallahi's return."

¶4. (C) Visit needs to focus on progress: The Europeans and UNDP ResRep all supported the view that the scheduled visit of senior-level representatives of the African Union, United Nations, European Union, Arab League, Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Francophonie had to be a sincere effort at finding a mutually acceptable resolution. A visit that confronted Aziz with ultimatums and the continued threat of sanctions would be, for them, "not worth doing." Saying "whether fair or not" they saw the only way out of the impasse having to start with a commitment by President Abdallahi to resign in exchange for an equal commitment from Aziz.

¶5. (C) We don't want to be back here in 2011: Charge noted there was a fundamental difference between the expressed

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European position and that of the U.S. Noting the regrettable implication of "blaming the victim," Charge stressed that an approach that plays along with the regime's concept of a "National Dialogue on Democracy" to be followed up by anticipated elections does not address the fundamental issues. With the military now openly boasting of how well they manipulated the last democratic transition, Charge added, "there is no sense finding a short-term solution allowing the military to again manipulate democratic elections -- we don't want to be back here in three years trying to resolve another coup." World Bank Rep Rantrua also challenged the Europeans for urging concessions from Abdallahi with nothing from Aziz saying their approach "legitimizes the coup." When he asked how they proposed to restore democracy if they give up on the President, the best he got from the Spaniard was, "We can't dictate the plan, but we can always tell them if what they propose is insufficient." Rantrua finally chastised the Europeans for undermining the harder-line position of the African Union -- "We Europeans are always critical for the Africans on not being serious about good governance. When they finally take a tough stand, all we do is cut them off at the head."

HANKINS